

Light

... on a
New World



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One Bible

God's kingdom in the past and its promised restoration

WHAT DO WE understand by the term God's kingdom? If we look around the contemporary religious world, we see that there are a variety of differing and conflicting views.

Many hold the 'traditional' view that God's kingdom is 'the church' over which Christ rules. This view dates back to the time of Augustine (7th Century), who was the first Archbishop of Canterbury. For such people the kingdom of God is extended by the mission and advancement of the church.

Others see the kingdom of God on a much more personal and social level. They view the kingdom as a 'reign of grace' in the hearts of men and for such people the kingdom comes by the moral advancement and social righteousness of mankind. This is a development of ideas put forward at the time of the reformation and today influences the views of more liberal thinkers.

There are also a variety of sectarian views. These vary from placing the kingdom of God in heaven after this world has been burnt up, to the idea we sometimes hear promoted on the doorstep, that God's kingdom was a system set up in 1914.

We find then, that today there is little agreement as to what God's kingdom is and yet, if we look at the teaching of Jesus Christ as recorded in the gospel narratives, we see that God's kingdom formed a central part of his message.

Jesus spoke for example, of the attitude of mind necessary for those who would be in the kingdom. He taught his disciples to pray for it to come. He said that many who expected to be in the kingdom of God would not be. He said that it was to be an inheritance for the blessed. He told parables to explain the nature of the kingdom

and the manner in which it would be set up. He told his followers to seek for it. He commissioned his apostles to preach it. He gave its keys to Peter, etc, etc.

THE KINGDOM OF ISRAEL

In view of this we want to pose another question: What did the people whom Jesus actually taught, understand by the term God's kingdom? In seeking to answer this question we need to remember that Jesus preached almost exclusively to the Jews of his day. He said that he was sent to *'the lost sheep of the house of Israel'*. Originally then, the term kingdom of God was set in a Jewish context and this is important to our understanding of the subject. For the Jewish audience of the days of Matthew, Mark and Luke, the kingdom of God was none other than the kingdom of Israel. For those people there was no difficulty in understanding the term. The Hebrew scriptures plainly taught that the nation of Israel was special. From them they learnt that:

God himself was the first king of Israel — hence it was 'God's kingdom.'¹

When they set up a man as king, he had to be a man *'...after his [God's] own heart.'*²

In view of the above, it was specifically called the *'kingdom of the LORD'*³ in later years.

The Kingdom was taken away from Israel because they disobeyed God's laws.⁴

In due time the kingdom of Israel (God's kingdom) would be restored to a greater glory than it had ever enjoyed before.⁵ The future king over God's kingdom was to be a descendant of king David.⁶

This teaches that God will intervene in the affairs of the nations to make this restoration come about.⁷

THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM

All this and more, the Jews of the first century would have had in mind when they were told by Jesus the Gospel of God's kingdom. Were they right in their assumptions? Did Jesus really preach the restoration of Israel's kingdom when he preached the gospel? The answer is emphatically yes! Nothing that Jesus said about the nature of the kingdom ever contradicted these Jewish expectations. Quite the reverse, in fact.

¹Judges 8.23; 1 Samuel 8.7, 1; Samuel 12.12 ²1 Samuel 13.14 ³1 Chronicles 28.5; 2 Chronicles 13.8 ⁴2 Kings 24.19,20; Ezekiel 21.25-27 ⁵Psalms 145.10-13; Zechariah 8.23; Isaiah 60.13-16 ⁶2 Samuel 7.12 ⁷Daniel 2.44

We find that after three and a half years of listening to his public preaching, as well as having numerous private briefings and conversations, his disciples still looked for the restoration of Israel's kingdom as foretold by Moses and the prophets. The Acts of the Apostles chapter 1 records some of their last words to Jesus.

They asked:

'... wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?'⁸

Their hope as Jesus departed from them was still firmly fixed on Israel as the basis of the kingdom.

The apostle Paul shared this hope when he later testified that:

'... for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain.'⁹

Israel's hope lay in the restoration of the kingdom on principles of righteousness and to a greater glory than of old as we have already noted. But the record of the Acts of the Apostles is even more specific on this question of the relationship between the gospel of the kingdom and Israel's hope.

We refer to the message that Peter preached as recorded in Acts: 3

'Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; and he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.'¹⁰

These words of Peter take away any doubt that the gospel of God's kingdom was to be understood in a Jewish sense as a fulfilment of the word of God spoken through his prophets. He links the return of Jesus from heaven with a divine intervention in the form of the predicted '*times of refreshing*' and '*times of restitution*' recorded in the Hebrew scriptures.

RESTORATION OF THE KINGDOM OF ISRAEL

We say then, that if we want properly to understand the nature of God's kingdom as it was originally preached by Jesus and his apostles, then it is to those Hebrew prophets that we must look. When we do so, we find that they speak of a restoration of the kingdom of Israel that is to mark a new beginning for mankind on the earth.

They prophesy an age of blessing such as has never before been seen, for sin and its effects of disease and death will be restrained. We give below a selection from the words of the prophets concerning the restored kingdom.

⁸Acts 1.6 ⁹Acts 28.20 ¹⁰Acts 3.19-21

God will intervene to establish the kingdom:

'And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever.'¹¹

Jerusalem is to be its capital:

'...For the law shall go forth from Zion, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off.'¹²

Israel is to be regathered:

'I will even gather you from the people, and assemble you out of the countries where ye have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel.'¹³

and purged of rebellion:

'And I will purge out from among you the rebels, and them that transgress against me.'¹⁴

ALL NATIONS TO BE BLESSED

The kingdom to be a blessing to all nations:

'He shall judge the poor of the people, he shall save the children of the needy, and shall break in pieces the oppressor . . . men shall be blessed in him: all nations shall call him blessed . . . let the whole earth be filled with his glory.'¹⁵

It will be an age of total disarmament and abolition of war:

'...they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.'¹⁶

An equitable distribution of wealth and resources:

'...they shall build houses, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them. They shall not build, and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat: for as the days of a tree are the days of my people, and mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands.'¹⁷

A vast increase in the earth's natural productivity:

'Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed; and the mountains shall drop sweet wine.'¹⁸

¹¹Daniel 2.44 ¹²Micah 4.2,3 ¹³Ezekiel 11.17 ¹⁴Ezekiel 20.38 ¹⁵Psalms 72.4,17,19

¹⁶Isaiah 2.4 ¹⁷Isaiah 65.21,22 ¹⁸Amos 9.13

People will be taught ways of righteousness:

'Thine eyes shall see thy teachers: And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left.'¹⁹

True worship of God throughout the world:

'For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering; for my name shall be great among the heathen, saith the LORD of hosts.'²⁰

The teaching of Jesus and the apostles and the understanding of their hearers, was founded on what was written in the scriptures. God's kingdom of the past was to be reformed and restored. Modern views are not built upon this original foundation. They represent a departure from the original gospel by the church.

The original gospel message is as valid today as it was when it was first preached. It needs no modification, indeed to modify it is to destroy it along with the testimony of all the prophets! They foresaw a new world order of truth and justice, reigned over by the Anointed of God (Jesus Christ), who would in due time return from heaven to set up his rulership of the kingdom in Jerusalem. This coming new world order was the Hope of Israel; it should be yours too.

Ian Giles
Loddon

¹⁹Isaiah 30.20,21 ²⁰Malachi 1.11

COVER PICTURE

For some of us, the mention of fishing boats is a reminder of pleasant holidays spent by the sea. We think of picturesque harbours dotted with small craft and a quayside where men with weather beaten faces sit mending their nets surrounded by the paraphernalia of the fisherman's trade.

Our cover picture presents a rather different scene. The fishermen on this shoreline are inspecting their nets beside the warm waters of the Red Sea in the gulf of Eilat. One of the articles in this issue of *Light on a New World* reminds us that fishing in small boats like the one in the picture has been an occupation in Bible lands for thousands of years.

We recall that the first disciples of Jesus were fishermen and that Jesus often taught the people by the side of the sea of Galilee where the disciples plied their trade. Sometimes Jesus would stand in one of these small fishing boats and preach to the crowds who followed him. On one such occasion, recorded in Luke chapter 5, the disciples had fished all night and caught nothing. Jesus instructed Peter to launch the boat into deep water and let the net down. As a result they caught a huge quantity of fish which broke the net and threatened to sink the boat. The miracle had such a profound effect on Peter and the others that they left their fishing and followed Jesus.

God has miraculously preserved his word, the Bible, so that we, like those men of Galilee can follow Jesus too. Let us listen to his words and respond to the call of the Gospel. For just like those fishermen who were rewarded for heeding the words of Jesus, he has promised the reward of everlasting life to those who truly follow him.

Incline Thine Ear Unto Wisdom

TRUST IN THE LORD WITH ALL THINE HEART

TRUST IS A lovely word. It conjures up images of the wide-eyed belief in a child's eyes, the soft adoring look of a puppy, tail thumping in eagerness, the pictures of trusting famine victims of a war-torn country when soldiers bring them food. Every day we show trust without realising it. We trust in our jobs, our health, our ability, our strength, our government, the social system, yes, even life itself. We have Trust Companies to whom we entrust our savings.

Trust is a built-in capacity in the human make-up. It began in our helplessness as an infant when we trusted in our parents for everything. In fact we trust so much, that we take too much for granted. It never even occurs to us not to trust that the sun will rise each morning and that the seasons will roll around. We get through Winter's dreariness because we trust that Summer will come.

But just a minute — why does the sun rise each day and the seasons roll around with such precision? Suppose they didn't. How do we know they are going to keep coming? 'Don't know, really, we just trust, that's all,' you say with a shrug of your shoulders, 'What does it matter anyway? Stop worrying — let's get on with life and enjoy it!'

Hey! Your little world might skid to a halt sooner than you think. Troubles don't just happen to the old. An accident, an illness, a bereavement, a disability can occur, sometimes through no fault of your own, and you will be brought up short with no buffer against the slowly dawning stark realisation that what you trusted in simply is non-existent. Not just the elderly, but the middle-aged and young are running scared these days. People are anxious about jobs and health. Financial worries are crowding in. There is increasing uneasiness about the future; depression is spreading like an infectious disease. So what do you trust in? Is it reliable?

THE THERAPEUTIC VALUE OF TRUST

At my high school, the school motto was in Latin — ‘Felix qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas.’ Fortunately I studied Latin so I knew what the words meant: ‘Happy is he who knows the reason for things.’ I used to think about those words and they had a profound effect upon my thinking and gave me an inner sense of wellbeing about life. I **did** know ‘the reason for things.’ I had been taught from a little child about God. Not just a God, but the one True God in the Bible, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. You see, there are a lot of vague ideas around today about belief in God. Psychologists and therapists will tell patients to have faith in God because they know that a hope and strong belief will uplift and help the mind to overcome trauma. Yes, the concept of trust, even blind trust is so important to human wellbeing, that it can restore a mental balance. We all must basically believe in something.

But people quickly come to realise that this kind of trust is phoney in the end. What you trust in must be reasonable. It must satisfy you. While you are looking for something to trust in, make sure it is trustworthy. If you are a thinking person you are going to ask some basic questions. Your reasoning may go like this:

- Is there really a God? Well, even the natural world seems to indicate so.
- Does this God have intelligence, a plan? You have to admit that design and purpose are everywhere in nature. Man himself is intelligent, so his Creator must be intelligent.
- Does God communicate and reveal Himself anywhere? We can gaze at lovely flowers, the starry sky and perfect creatures for hours on end but they are all silent. They confirm that there is an all-powerful intelligence out there, but don’t say who or what He is.
- If we have the power of speech, then our Creator must be able to speak. This is fundamental. And so He does! This God reveals Himself in His Holy Book, the Bible. And guess what! One thing He asks us to do is to have trust in Him. The poetry of King David in the Psalms tell us scores of times to, ‘*Trust in him at all times.*’¹ In Job, one of the early books of the Bible it says, ‘*Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.*’² Just a minute now, what is the point of trusting in a God who might slay us? More on that later.

Paul, a writer in the New Testament says:

‘... she that is a widow indeed, and desolate, trusteth in God, and continueth in supplications and prayers night and day.’³

Jesus Christ, the central figure of Christianity, trusted in God, his Father.⁴ Jesus told his disciples ‘*that they should always pray and not give up.*’⁵ In other

¹Psalm 62.8 ²Job 13.15 ³1 Timothy 5.5

⁴Hebrews 2.13 (NIV — Schofield) ⁵Luke 18.1 (NIV — Schofield)

words, trust God especially when we have nowhere to turn. The sub-title of this article comes from the Book of Proverbs⁶ where the advice to '*trust in the Lord*' is repeated a number of times. Is this advice reliable? Does this kind of trust really satisfy when a life-threatening trouble looms?

The concept of trust is related to other words such as belief, hope, confidence, conviction, respect and faith. The Bible talks a lot about all these concepts. God wants us to trust in Him. '*...The work of God is this,*' says Jesus, '*to **believe** in the one he has sent.*'⁷ So belief or trust in His son is what God requires of us.

The Apostle Paul advises:

'...anyone who comes to him [God] must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.'⁸

God is pleased when His creation gives Him the respect of trusting in Him, so much so that He offers the reward of eternal life to those who believe in Him.

It is not easy to develop this kind of trust in these times. Cynicism about divine things is rampant. We have been conditioned from babyhood to trust in material things around us.

If you are feeling down, you go out, even buy something new, perhaps a dress, a compact disk or a computer game. Or you might take a holiday, have a new hair style, seek some professional help, go to a show, depending on your age or the problem. All these things have one characteristic in common — they are 'quick fixes.' They put off the day of reckoning. They do not satisfy our inner longings.

THE BIBLE IS TRUSTWORTHY

We have indicated that the Bible has the answer to life's problems. It offers a reason for everything and a rewarding destiny which can be relied upon. How can we develop a trust in this book? How can we be sure it is **really** the answer? Well, you owe it to yourself to at least give it some thorough investigation. And the sooner the better, because you may not have the opportunity later on. Make no mistake about it, one day your personal world will come tumbling down around you, and you will need every ounce of spiritual belief to help you through. If you have been worshipping one of the twin gods, Evolution or Humanism, they have nothing, absolutely nothing to offer beyond the present. It is wise to sort out these matters ahead of time and know where you are headed. An ounce of prevention is still worth a pound of cure even in spite of metrication!

⁶Proverbs 3.5 ⁷John 6.29 (NIV — Schofield) ⁸Hebrews 11.6 (NIV — Schofield)

You wouldn't rent a house, choose a doctor, select a school, or buy a second hand car without first making plenty of enquiries. (Unless you blindly trust, of course, and that is foolish in the extreme!) It is the same as finding out about God and His revelation. It is important to find out all we can about God and His Book, the Bible. Frequently there are articles in this magazine which give evidence demonstrating the authenticity of the Holy Scriptures, their historical accuracy through archaeology and fulfilled prophecy, the reliability of the pivotal fact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, upon which everything else hinges.

LEARN ALL YOU CAN!

You will find to your satisfaction that there is plenty of information in the Bible about God and why you can trust in Him. The answer is to shake off today's liberal attitudes toward religious belief and develop some child-like trust. It is considered too simplistic to believe in the Bible, but don't forget, the other gods of Materialism and Evolution have no answers either. It seems incredible that people will ignore the obvious evidence of immense power, permanency and precision of the universe which shouts of some sort of divine supervision and will choose instead to believe in themselves.

Jesus himself advised:

'... Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.'⁹

How do children trust? — without question, implicitly, absolutely, humbly, adoringly. They trust people bigger than themselves because they do not know the answers. They don't even know the questions! This is how we are to trust in God.

While looking at this verse from the Gospel of Mark, let's think about what is meant by the Kingdom of God. What is this Kingdom that the child-like in faith will enter? We learn from other parts of the Bible that the Kingdom is the reward promised by God. Here are some Bible facts about the Kingdom:

- **It will take the place of present-day governments:** '... the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever.'¹⁰

Christ will be King in God's Kingdom — 'The Lord God will give him [Jesus] the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; his kingdom will never end.'¹¹

- **Duration of the Kingdom** — The above verses indicate that it will last forever.

⁹Mark 10.14,15 (NIV — Schofield) ¹⁰Daniel 2.44 (NIV — Schofield)

¹¹Luke 1.32,33 (NIV — Schofield)

- **Characteristics of the Kingdom** — ‘They [the nations] will beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruninghooks; Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war any more. Every man will sit under his own vine and under his own fig-tree, and no-one will make them afraid.’¹²
- **When will the Kingdom come?** Soon! Jesus gave many signs of his return to the earth to set up the Kingdom of God.

In graphic symbolic language Jesus said,

‘There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world . . . At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.’¹³

He predicted extreme violence and careless living just as it was in the days of Noah and Lot, wars and rumours of wars.

These and many others signs indicate that Jesus’ return is near at hand. That is why there isn’t a lot of time to spare in deciding to put your trust in God.

OUR BIGGEST PROBLEM — DEATH

If God has offered eternal life in His Kingdom, then there must be some way to escape death. This painful subject is also covered thoroughly in the Bible. God has graciously provided a way to overcome the permanency of death. This is through the provision of Jesus Christ, His only Son, as a sacrifice to take away the sins of the world.

‘This is how God showed his love among us: He sent His one and only [begotten*] Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.’¹⁴

God really wants us to believe this, because he provided Jesus out of His love for his creation. The Apostle John exclaims at the end of his life:

‘How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!’¹⁵

In our suspicious, unbelieving humanity, it is hard to contemplate that the great God of the Universe loves us, knows our needs and has provided a way of escape from death. If you find this difficult to trust in, just ask yourself, do the other gods, Evolution and Humanism or Materialism, offer the promise of eternal life? They offer nothing! They have no realistic solutions to the problems facing mankind today.

¹²Micah 4.3,4 (NIV — Schofield) ¹³Luke 21.25-27 (NIV — Schofield) ¹⁴1 John 4.9,10

* refer footnote (NIV — Schofield) ¹⁵1 John 3.1 (NIV — Schofield)

LIGHT ON A NEW WORLD

The Psalms warn against such blind trust:

'Do not put your trust in princes, in mortal men, who cannot save. When their spirit departs, they return to the ground; on that very day their plans come to nothing.'¹⁶

Let us resolve to take the advice of the wise man and '*Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.*'¹⁷

Martin Webster,
Queensville, Ont. Canada

¹⁶Psalm 146.3,4 (NIV — Schofield) ¹⁷Prov. 3.5



Today, fishing is still a major industry on the Sea of Galilee. As in the days of Jesus, many people still earn their living from this activity. Some ten miles from Capernaum, excavations undertaken at MAGDALA TARICHEAE, have brought to light a building believed to be a first century synagogue, about 8 metres by 9 metres in size.

It is believed to be one where Jesus preached his message to his fellow Galilean Jews, when he '*went throughout all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues.*'¹

¹Matt 9.35; 4.23

Modern Fishing Boat
heading towards Capernaum

Bible Occupations

The Fisherman

FISHING: IT MEANS very different things to different people. For some it means hard, sometimes dangerous work even with large boats and modern equipment. For others it means hard work using traditional methods. For still others fishing conjures up images of a relaxing outdoor sport.

In waters shallow or deep, warm or cold, fresh or salty, running or still, with net, hook and line, spear or arrow, alone or with companions, these are some of the dimensions of fishing. You may be thinking of others besides.

In this article we want to consider fishing in Bible times and draw some lessons from this consideration for life today. Remember that at least seven of Jesus' disciples were fishermen. Peter in particular was called by Jesus to be a 'fisher of men.'¹ What did this imply? And what can we retain of benefit from this example? These are some of the questions we want to address in what follows.

Biblical references tell us something about fishing and the occupation of fishermen. First then, it would perhaps be worthwhile to review this information.

KINDS OF FISH AND SOURCES OF SUPPLY

The general Hebrew words for water-creatures are *dag* and *daga*. According to the Mosaic law² water-creatures having fins and scales were 'clean', but those without fins and scales (for example shellfish) were 'unclean'.

The creature which swallowed Jonah is called 'a great fish' in Jonah.³ Matthew carefully adopts the same designation (Greek *Ketos*, 'a large sea-monster',⁴ translated and interpreted by the AV and the RV as 'whale').

The common Greek word for fish in the New Testament is *ichthys*. We also find the diminutive *ichthydion*, 'little fish', for example in the records of Jesus' miraculous feeding of the four thousand,⁵ and *opsarion*, small fish eaten with bread.⁶

¹Matthew 4.19 ²Leviticus 11.9-12; Deuteronomy 14.9,10 ³Jonah 1.17 ⁴Matthew 12.40

⁵Matthew 15.34; Mark 8.7 ⁶John 6.11

The fishermen of the parable of the drag-net⁷ discarded some fish because they were too small, inedible or 'unclean'.

The Bible mentions Egypt as a place where fish are plentiful.⁸ The Sea of Galilee⁹ and Tyre on the Mediterranean coast¹⁰ are also noted as ample sources of supply.

FISHERMEN AND THEIR METHODS

The strenuous life of fishermen required a strong physique¹¹ and their language was sometimes rough.¹² As mentioned at the outset, at least seven of Jesus' disciples were fishermen: Peter, Andrew, probably Philip, who also came from Bethsaida (Aramaic for 'house of fishing') on the Sea of Galilee, James, John, Thomas, and Nathanael.¹³ Some of these were partners in fishing and were used to working together.¹⁴

The Bible mentions fishing by spear or harpoon,¹⁵ by hook¹⁶ and by net. The kinds of nets specified in the Bible are the casting net¹⁷ and the large drag-net.¹⁸

On the Sea of Galilee the fishermen used small boats, which were propelled by oars.¹⁹ The statement that the wind was contrary²⁰ may indicate the use of a sail as in the present-day fishing boats on this lake. Often on the Sea of Galilee fishing was done by night.²¹ During the day the fisherman on the shore or wading in the water could throw the casting-net.²² Larger nets were let down by several men from boats.²³ The fish were either loaded into the boat²⁴ or the nets were dragged to shore.²⁵ The fish were then sorted, the saleable ones put in baskets and the useless ones thrown away.²⁶

The Bible does not refer to fishing as a recreation.

MARKETING AND PREPARATION

In Jerusalem there was a Fish Gate (perhaps on the north side of the city), through which traders brought their fish to sell to the inhabitants.²⁷ In Bible times, the common methods of preparing fish for eating were roasting,²⁸ salting and drying.

FIGURATIVE AND SYMBOLIC USES

Fishing is used in the Old Testament as a figure of God's judgement on nations or individuals.²⁹

By contrast, New Testament symbolism surrounding fishing has rather different tones. Jesus called disciples to become fishers of men.³⁰ We will return to

⁷Matthew 13.48 ⁸Numbers 11.5 ⁹Luke 5.6 ¹⁰Nehemiah 13.16 ¹¹Luke 5.2 ¹²Mark 14.70 ¹³Matthew 4.18,21; John 1.44; John 21.2,3 ¹⁴Luke 5.7,10 ¹⁵Job 41.7 ¹⁶Job 41.1,2; Isaiah 19.8; Matthew 17.27 ¹⁷Matthew 4.18 ¹⁸Matthew 13.47 ¹⁹John 6.19 ²⁰Matthew 14.24 ²¹Luke 5.5; John 21.3 ²²Matthew 4.18 ²³Luke 5.4 ²⁴Luke 5.7 ²⁵Matthew 13.48; John 21.8 ²⁶Matthew 13.48 ²⁷Zephaniah 1.10 ²⁸John 21.9 ²⁹Jeremiah 16.16; Ezekiel 32.3 ³⁰Matthew 4.19

this theme shortly. We understand the disciples' mission in a very positive sense; that is, of preaching 'the good news of the Kingdom of God', a message that was able to make the earnest listener wise unto salvation. The disciples were gathering people to the gospel in the same sense as a fisherman gathers fish in his nets. Jesus himself applied this image to the Kingdom of God in one of his many and varied descriptions of it.

'Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: Which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away.'³¹

We note that being 'caught up' in the gospel net is a necessary and harmless part of coming to God. It is no guarantee, however, of being found pleasing before Jesus Christ in the coming day of judgement. Whether one is classed as a 'good fish' or a 'bad fish' on that day is really a matter of the choices one makes as an individual: choosing the ways that lead to life or those that lead to death. The Lord is 'not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.'³² On the basis of this verse, we can be reassured that from God's point of view, no fish caught in the gospel net is predestined to be rejected. Why not choose to identify yourself as a 'good fish' in the making?

It is interesting to note as we conclude this section that the fish was one of the earliest symbols of Christian art. This was because the letters of the Greek *ichthys* were taken as an acrostic for *Iesous Christos Theou Hyios Soter*, 'Jesus Christ, God's Son, Saviour'. The New Testament figurative uses of fish and fishing, some of which we have discussed above, surely provide the origins for the adoption of this symbol.

FISHERS OF MEN

We return now to the calling of Jesus' disciples, focusing particularly on the case of Peter.

An isolated reading of the gospel records may give one the impression that Peter (and the other disciples for that matter) were called upon once by Jesus and that they followed him from that time on. A comparison of the texts shows otherwise and it is useful to understand this since the lessons will apply to your own calling by God through His Son Jesus Christ.

In Peter's case, three different callings are recorded. The first was when John the Baptist was still active in his ministry, recorded in John.³³

Secondly, we have the parallel accounts of the same event given in Matthew and Mark.³⁴ Jesus called Simon Peter and Andrew and said to them '*Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.*' This calling was after John the Baptist had been imprisoned.

³¹Matthew 13.47,48 ³²II Peter 3.9 ³³John 1.35-42 ³⁴Matthew 4.18,19; Mark 1.16,17

Finally, Luke³⁵ provides the third calling, also after John the Baptist had been imprisoned, but from the context, clearly a different calling than that recorded by Matthew and Mark. The miracles of Luke chapter 4, Jesus' teaching of the crowd from Simon Peter's boat, followed by the miraculous draught of fishes and Jesus' word to Simon Peter following this moving incident: *'Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men'*³⁶ all show that this was a different and definitive calling of Peter.

So we find that Peter's calling was progressive. Jesus called him to his ministry at least three different times. If you feel the gospel call has touched you, it may be reassuring to know from Peter's case that our calling is not a *'one time only offer'* on God's part. We can only encourage you to continue to *'draw nigh to God'* as James advises,³⁷ offering at the same time the reassurance that *'He [God] will draw nigh to you.'*

The example of Peter provides further material for consideration under our theme of Bible occupations. Called three times to follow Jesus, we find that Peter three times denied his Master at the crucifixion. After he was raised from the dead, the third appearance of Jesus to his immediate disciples, as recorded in John 21 is particularly interesting.

The miraculous draught of fish was a sign to the disciples, who had returned temporarily to their previous occupation, that Jesus was again with them, standing on the shore. After they had landed their boats and the bulging net full of fish, the disciples ate the bread and roasted fish Jesus offered them. Jesus then three times in similar words addressed Simon Peter effectively reinstating him as an apostle. Each time though Jesus uses a completely different occupational image in commissioning Peter: *'Feed my lambs'* and twice *'Feed my sheep.'*³⁸

This repeated instruction must have impressed Peter (a fisherman being asked to tend sheep!), but it perhaps symbolises the permanent changes Peter was undergoing in his service to Christ.

— the net of the gospel call has reached, reaches and will reach people from all walks of life.

— the aspect that is common for all is that following Christ means changing and transforming oneself to conform more and more to His image and example in obedience to His commands and His will for us.

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³⁵Luke 5.1-11 ³⁶Luke 5.10 ³⁷James 4.8 ³⁸John 21.15-17